



companions on the road

Rajinder Arora

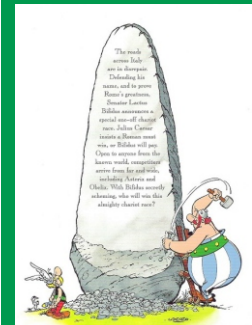
MILESTONES



The Milliarium Aureum (above), or the Golden Milestone (Italian: Miliario Aureo) was a monument, probably of marble or gilded bronze, erected by the Emperor Caesar Augustus near the Temple of Saturn in the Central Forum of Ancient Rome. All roads were considered to begin at this monument and all distances in the Roman Empire were measured relative to it. On it, perhaps, were listed all the major cities in the empire and distances to them, though the monument's precise location and inscription remain matters of debate among historians. *Wikipedia*



One of the finest references to milestones also appears in *Asterix and the Chariot Race*. And herebelow Obelix is chiseling by a menhir describing the condition of roads leading to Rome.



© Astreix Comic series

Milestones were originally stone obelisks – made from granite, marble, or other locally available stone – and later these were made as concrete posts. These were widely used by Roman Empire road builders and were an important part of any Roman road network: the distance travelled per day was only a few miles in some cases.

Many Roman milestones only record the name of the reigning emperor without giving any place names or distances. The first Roman milestones appeared on the Appian way. At the centre of Rome, the “Golden Milestone” was erected to mark the presumed centre of the empire: this milestone has since been lost. From approx 123 BC, milestones were erected every 1000 paces (known as the Roman mile). As the road network expanded, man started to travel for trade, for exploration and for learning and in this pursuit a milestone provided much needed reassurance to the travelers that they are moving in right path and direction with fixed idea of reaching a certain place in fixed time, meeting people on the way, making friends and trade-partners. These milestones are a tribute to our history when maps were rare and the only mode of transport was either by foot or on horse-back.

Milestones have a fascinating history to tell.



Roman milestone XXIX on Via Romana XVIII – the road linking the Iberian cities of Bracara Augusta and Asturica Augusta.



You can safely say that the history of roads (and thus history of the direction/distance markers) is as old as the history of man on earth. The pre-historic group of men would have carved a narrow way by constantly going in a certain direction, to hunt for food. Many a times they would have lost their way because of not being able to come back in day light, or the rain and storm could have destroyed their foot prints, or sheer depletion of light would not let them recognise other signs of getting back to their caves. This is when the ancient man started marking trees, etching boulders enroute or leaving other physical signs to trace their way back home. In hilly and high altitude mountainous region, even today, we find 'cairns' as the direction markers over

several routes. These were all precursor to milestones of modern times. [Cairns are carefully placed piles of rocks built by mountain travellers or trail guides to mark trails and help hikers each the desired destination].

The initial narrow way was a footpath or pathway. This rough pathway can be considered as the first road marks. The utility and necessity of pathway must have gradually developed with the coming of wheeled carts. These pathway must have been widened into a roadway which was the beginning of road as a means of travel, exploration, communication and transport.

Road development in the Indian subcontinent can be traced back to



approximately 2800 BC from the ancient cities of Harrapa and Mohenjodaro of the Indus Valley Civilization which had a well designed network of 'paved' streets, pathways and roads. Ruling emperors of ancient India had constructed roads to connect the towns and cities. The Rig Veda mentions 'Mahapaths' as a means of communication during the Aryan period.



King Ashoka (riding a chariot) visits Ramagrama, to take relics of the Buddha from the Nagas, but in vain. Southern gateway, Stupa 1, Sanchi. Photo: Wikipedia.

A 'pucca road' was built in Rajgir town of Patna district in Bihar by king Bimbisara in 600 B.C. This road was 6 to 7 m wide and was made of stones. The road exists till date.

In the record of his travel, the famous Chinese traveler, Fahien speaks very highly of the roads in India during the time of Emperor Ashoka of Maurayn Dynasty (3rd century BC). If we look at the archeological evidence of that era we are sure that chariots were very common in that period which confirms that there must have been cobbled or paved roads to run these chariots.

While there were roads going in all directions to various towns ruled by these empires, there was no signage indicating the town they were going to or the distance between any two points. The Roman empire was presumably the first one to use large obelisks marking direction, distance and the names of towns/cities.

In the Indian sub-continent, milestones were introduced by the earliest Mughals traveling from the Central-Asian Great Steppes through Afghanistan and entering India having crossed the Indus river. Mughal warriors were great at horse riding and travelled long distance every day. Having settled in India they

built roads, and alongside these roads were places for night halts, provision for cooking, source of water and stables for horses. Some of these charged the travellers for their stay. These places called caravan-sarais, were also used as watch towers and information gathering points for the kings men. Fruit trees were planted along these roads and over a period of time the keepers of these *sarais* also started growing vegetables and grain around them. Along these caravan-sarais tall imposing structures called *Kos Minars* were built. These Minars were made at fixed distance of 3 kos, or 2 kms. These were the first milestones of India.

A milestone is one of a series of numbered stones placed along a road at intervals of one mile or multiple of miles. They are typically located at the side of the road. Some of these also have another number painted on the side which indicates their number in a series on that road. They are alternatively known as mile markers, mileposts, mile posts of miliarium. Mileage is the distance along the road from a fixed commencement point. Milestones were originally stone obelisks – made from granite, marble, or whatever local stone was available without any inscriptions – and later concrete posts.

Milestones are installed to provide reference points along the road. This can be used to reassure travellers that the proper path is being followed, and to indicate the remaining distance to a destination. Such references are also used by road maintenance staff and emergency services to direct them to specific points where their presence is required. This term is sometimes used to denote a location on a road even if no physical sign is present. This is useful for accident reporting and other record keeping (e.g., “an accident occurred at the 13 mile mark” even if the road is only marked with a stone once every 10 miles). In the city of Gurgaon in Haryana, a particular highway restaurant is popularly known as 32nd Milestone.

The historical term milestone is still used today, even though the “stones” are typically metal highway location markers and in most countries use kilometres and metres rather miles and



yards. Also found today are similar looking signs indicating the position of buried high voltage cables and even compressed natural gas pipes.

Roman Empire

Milestones were widely used by Roman Empire road builders and were an important part of any Roman road network though the distance travelled per day was only a few miles in some cases. Many Roman milestones only record the name of the reigning emperor without giving any place-names or distances. The first Roman milestones appeared on the Appian Way. At the centre of Rome, the “Golden Milestone” was erected to mark the presumed centre of the empire: the original milestone has since been lost.

India

The *Kos Minars* (Mughal milestones) or Mile Pillars are medieval milestones that were ordered to be erected by the 16th-century Afghan Ruler Sher Shah Suri and later added to by other Mughal emperors. These *Minars* were erected on main highways across the empire to mark the distance.

A *Kos Minar* is a solid round pillar, around 30 feet (9.1 m) in height that stands on a masonry platform built

with bricks and plastered over with lime. Though not architecturally very impressive, they were an important part of communication and travel in a large empire.

Kos is an ancient Indian unit of distance. It can represent either a distance of approximately 1.8 kilometres (1.1 mi) or 3.2 kilometres (2.0 mi). *Minar* is a Persian word for tower. Abul Fazl recorded in *Akbar Nama* that in the year 1575 AD, Akbar issued an order that at every *kos* on the way from Agra to Ajmer, a pillar or a *minar* should be erected for the comfort of the travelers.

Byzantine Empire

A mile-marker monument, the *Milion*, was erected in the early 4th Century AD in Constantinople. It served as the starting point for measurement of distances for all the roads leading to the cities of the Byzantine Empire, and had the same function as the *Milliarium Aureum* of Ancient Rome. The *Milion* survived intact until at least the late 15th century. Its fragments were discovered again in the late 1960s.

The Byzantine Empire was the continuation of the Roman Empire in the Greek-speaking, eastern part of

the Mediterranean. Christian in nature, it was perennially at war with the Muslims, Flourishing during the reign of the Macedonian emperors, its demise was the consequence of attacks by Seljuk Turks, Crusaders, and Ottoman Turks.



Post-Medieval Europe

The British built many milestones on the island of Malta. They consisted of large slabs of local hard rock and were engraved with the distance to or from a particular location. Many of these were defaced in World War II to disorientate forces in a potential invasion.

In the USA

The Golden Milestone of Rome inspired the Zero Milestone in Washington, D.C., intended as the point from which all road distances in the United States should be reckoned. Odometers were used to measure the Roman milestone spacing, most likely based on Ancient Greek Technology.

While stepping out of the house today, how assured you feel, whether on a drive around your own city or on a long interstate drive with a GPS installed in your car or connected to Google Maps guiding you through the journey; which road to take, where to turn and keep on the right course to reach your destination. Not just the road, today we even have the luxury of knowing how far is the next petrol pump or a way side eatery, a washroom or a place to relax or spend the night.

But think of the times when the GPS or digital way-finders were not around, of the times when even the physical paper maps were also not mass produced and were rare, when roads were not paved,

when there no means of transport besides being on foot or probably riding a horse cart, when travel was fraught with danger of being looted or killed by thugs, the danger of ferocious animals, when there no places for night halts, not even a chance of finding food or water enroute, when the evening or night meant to stop, climb a tree or hide in a cave, if at all...when there were no street lights but for the moonlight and the guiding stars, only if you knew how to read them.

And of course, there were no road signs. But more than 2200 years back there were some parts of the world where, markers by the side of the road, reassured travellers that they were heading in the right

direction and getting closer to their destination with every step. These markers or solitary sentinels around mud tracks were called milestones, *sangmeel* or *meelpathar*.

The word *Sangmeel* is a Persian conjoined word. *Sang* means stone and *Meel* is the measure of distance. Thus *Sangmeel* means milestone. Like *Sang-marmar*, the smooth, or soft silky stone, and similarly the Hindi word *Meel Pathar*.

If you find any old milestones along the road side, please stop and look at them, admire them, think of the people who thought of placing or erecting them at designated points only to help and assure you that you are on the right path.

COLOUR CODES FOR MILESTONES ON INDIAN HIGHWAYS/ROADS

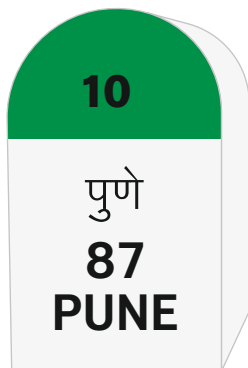
NATIONAL HIGHWAY

YELLOW



STATE HIGHWAY

GREEN



CITY ROADS

BLACK



RURAL ROADS

ORANGE





A Kos Minar outside the Delhi Zoo and facing Purana Qila.

Kos Minar

Much before the milestones were used on pucca /tarred roads in Asia, imposing and tall structures called Kos Minars were seen in India. The Kos Minars or Mile Pillars are medieval milestones that were made by the 16th-century Afghan Ruler Sher Shah Suri and later on added by Mughal emperors.

Sher Shah Suri had them built on one of Grand Trunk Road (GT Road), from Chittagong (now in Bangladesh) to Kabul in Afghanistan, the earliest and longest well-organised road in Asia (can be called a highway in contemporary times) which linked Indian subcontinent with other Asian countries.

The length of GT Road is approx 2,500 km. Kos Minars were erected by the Mughal Emperors on the main highways across the empire to mark the distance. Around these Minars were also the Caravan Sarais and stables for horses. A Kos Minar is a solid round pillar, around 30 feet (9.1 m) high with a bottom circumference of about 4 mt that stands on a masonry platform built with bricks and plastered over with lime. Though not architecturally very impressive, being milestones, they were an important part of communication and travel in a large empire. Some of these Minars also carried the names of the ruling kings, and the year they were built in while some others

कोस मीनार

carried the name of area they were built in. Over the years most of the Kos Minars have fallen to vagaries of weather and development or have been destroyed by land grabbers. However, recent efforts by the archeological department has ensured that some of these have been restored and are now protected monuments both in India and Pakistan.

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A Kos Minar on Agra highway



A road sign on Mall Road (part of Grand Trunk Road) in Rawalpindi, Pakistan

MARKERS OF HISTORY



A Kos Minar on GT Road in Punjab

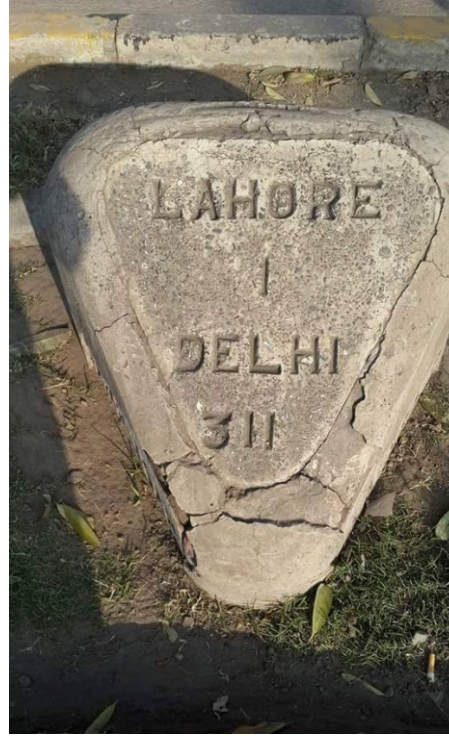
A Kos Minar along GT Road at Taraori in Karnal, Haryana





Part of the original 16th Century cobbled GT Road in Kabul, Afghanistan with portion of the Kos Minar

Milestones on Delhi-Lahore Grand Trunk Road



These pre-Independence era milestones on GT Road between Delhi and Lahore still exist at a few locations between Delhi and Lahore. One each is known to have survived in Delhi, Ludhiana, Ferozpur, Amritsar and Lahore.

Some old Indian milestones



Located at a tri-junction and next to the MPTDC Tourist Lodge in Piparia, this milestone has inscriptions on three of the four faces. The inscriptions are on arched marble plaques and record distance in miles and heights in feet. The milestone looks more like a miniature temple and has inscriptions on three side. The inscription is on arched marble plaques. Two sides contains distances in miles from nearby destinations. The third side contains names of places along with their altitude in feet.

Zero Mile Stones

Zero Mile Stones are those milestones in a city from where all further distances are measured. For example, the Zero milestone in Delhi (below) is at Rajghat, the place where Mahatma Gandhi's samadhi is there. It is from this point in Delhi that all distance going in different directions are measure and given. Similarly when you are coming in to Delhi, the distance given on various milestones are given up to this point.



The Zero Mile Stone in Nagpur, Maharashtra is a monument built by the British during Great Trigonometrical Survey of India in 1907. The Zero Mile Stone pillar is made of sandstone and another small stone representing the GTS Standard Bench Mark. The four stucco horses next to it were added later. Contrary to the popular belief, there is no verifiable evidence that it is a monument locating the geographical centre of colonial India or that the Zero Mile Stone was erected by the British to use this point to measure all the distances.



Heritage lost and found

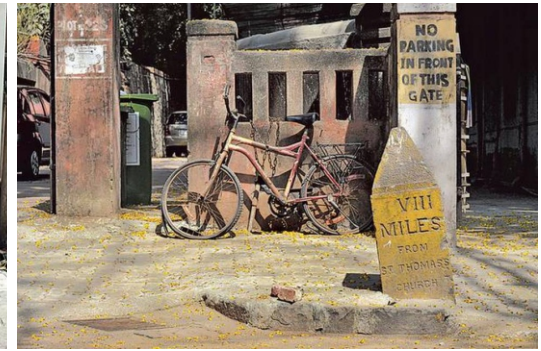
Milestones of British era recently found in Mumbai

Workers of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation recently found and restored British era milestones around Parel area. These milestones are of pre-motored vehicles times and are a part of Mumbai's heritage.

The '0' milestone was located at St Thomas Cathedral at Horniman Circle. Five milestones were located nearly buried in the footpath.

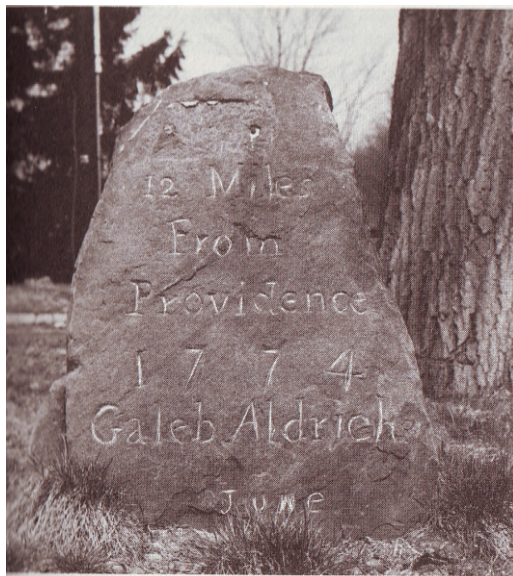


A Mumbai resident, Vinayak Talwar, stands beside the V milestone located inside Colaba's Badwar Park Colony



Some ancient milestones from other parts of the world

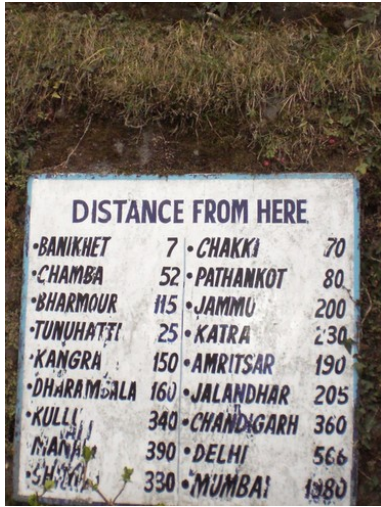




Children helping restore a heritage milestone in England. A great way of learning your past.



Distance / territory markers - unlike milestones



Boundary or distance markers for Bhutan, Myanmar and Bangladesh



Distance and altitude marker built by BRO



Road signs in 21st Century



Traditional style milestones are fast vanishing. With the expansion of road network and multi-lane highways a new style of distance indicators are evolving in the form of Gantries. These are large overhead signs, placed high above the road, in direct gaze of the driver so these can be seen from a distance. These are visible even at night as they are made of reflective colour film which doesn't need external source of lighting. Multiple languages on these help local drivers identify their route easily.



Milestones from various parts of the country



Though these markers are called milestones, the distance given on them is in kilometers and not miles.





check these out



By the side of a road but not alone

Humorous Road Signs by BRO

These signs along the roads are technically not milestones but they serve an equally good purpose of breaking the monotony of long tiresome journey through the desolate, barren, dangerous and sometime desolate areas of the Indian Himalayas.

Reading these hilarious and thought provoking signs provide much needed caution and relief while driving on treacherous stretches. Some of these depict great sense of humour.

Roads in hilly, mountainous and also dense jungle regions of India, specially around Indian borders with countries, like China, Nepal, Pakistan, Myanmar, Bhutan and Bangladesh are mostly maintained by Border Road Organisation (BRO) through General Reserve Engineering Force of the Indian Army. These signs, erected by BRO, not only add colour to the muted surroundings but also send an alert signal to weary drivers. The BRO manages its jobs through its Task Forces, mentioned on these signs as TF.

Some of these Task Forces are named as Arunank, Beacon, Brahmark, Chetak etc. The BRO operates and maintains thousands of kilometres of roads, bridges, tunnels and many an airfields in the country. In India, some of the roads run-over the highest motorable mountain passes in the world.

These are Umling La (19,300 ft); Dungri La, also known as Mana Pass (18,406 ft); Khardung La (17,882 ft) [wrongly mentioned as 18,380 ft and also as the Highest motorable pass]; Tanglang La (17,480 ft) and Chang La (17,586 ft). 'La' means a mountain pass. The hardy men of BRO quickly clear landslides, avalanches and snow block on the routes maintained by them and facilitate uninterrupted movement of traffic in all weathers. Border Road Organisation has its own construction wing known as Road Construction Companies (RCCs). The BRO also played a vital role in reconstruction work in the aftermath of the devastating 2004 tsunami in Tamil Nadu, the 2005 Kashmir earthquake, and the 2010 Ladakh flash floods.



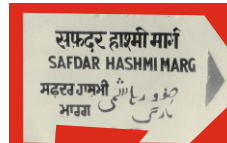


High mountain pass signs in the Himalayas

In India, some of the roads run over the highest motorable mountain passes in the world. Umling La (19,300 ft); Dungri La or Mana Pass (18,406 ft); Khardung La (17,882 ft) [wrongly mentioned as 18,380 ft and also as the highest motorable pass]; Tanglang La (17,480 ft) and Chang La (17,586 ft). A La means a mountain Pass.



but then



**'Life isn't a matter of milestones,
but of moments'**

Rose Kennedy



'Justice ∞ (infinte) km', a milestone used as a prop by Lakshya, theatre group of Kamla Nehru College, Delhi while performing the play *Justice Abhi Far Hai* at JNU in Delhi, as a tribute to Safdar Hashmi.

Dharavi in Mumbai is possibly the largest slum in the world. The milestone here proudly displays what it is known for.



BUSINESS AS USUAL

BY UNNY

The buck will have to wait. Meanwhile the bullet train will stop hereabouts in 2022.

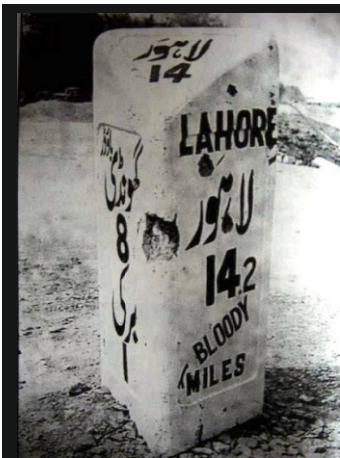


April 2018

Renowned cartoonist Unny uses a milestone as a mark of respect to those killed in Gujarat violence in 2002 after the Supreme Court acquitted all suspects.



*The message
a milestone
gives is that
you are
never alone.*



A war destroys everything in its path, even a milestone has to bear its brunt. Look at this bullet ridden milestone (left) after the 1965 India-Pakistan war. "Lahore 14.2 Bloody Miles" The word Bloody here is actually painted in red. The one on right is of the same period in Khemkaran sector of Punjab which saw one of the fiercest tank battle.



The last milestone in Jammu, at the India-Pakistan border.



Asia Highway 1 (AH1) milestone on India-Pakistan border at Wagha, Panjab. AH1 is the longest route of the Asian Highway Network, running 20,557 km from Tokyo, Japan to the west of Istanbul where it joins with European route E80.





One of the largest milestones in the world is in Ecuador marking the line of Equator, Latitude 0-0-0,

On the right is the milestone plaque on 45th Parallel which is equidistant from North Pole and the Equator



Above: Pole marker at North Pole, Arctic.

Below: the one at South Pole, Antarctic.



Trust me, even if you want you cannot lose your way here. This sign (not a milestone) is less than 5km before the Everest Base Camp (see Mt Everest in the backdrop). There is no other track you can follow but the semi-glacial boulder strewn wilderness to the base of the peak at Khumbu Glacier at 17,600 feet.

Popularly known as White Desert, the stunning white sands of the Great Rann of Kutch is a salt marsh located in Kutch district of Gujarat. It is a part of the Thar Desert, just 6km from the village of Dhordo.



Road expansion, repair and unregulated carpeting of roads, heaps upon heaps of more and more bitumen over the existing surface is not only raising the road levels in all cities but is also eating up the heritage structures and milestones in the process. The so called development and encroachment of road or footpath spaces is yet another reason where encroachers uproot the milestones and use the space to set up shacks along road sides.

Look at the picture of this Chennai Zero milestone which is slowly being swallowed by the rising level of road. In less than a decade only one fifth of the milestone is left visible. In the last picture don't miss the height of the pavement which is most difficult to climb even by youngsters, for the elderly or the infirm it is impossible to step on to this 14 inch high pavement.

Language row: Bearing the brunt of 'language supremacy fight', milestones and local sign boards have come under severe defacement and destruction at the hands of people who are contesting the use of their local language vis-vis the imposition of Hindi in non-Hindi speaking areas. Rightfully so, the milestones and signs must carry the local language first and then English and/or Hindi for the benefit of other people.



An Ode to Terminus (the God of boundary stones - in turn milestones)

When night has passed, let the god be celebrated
With customary honour, who separates the fields with his sign.
Terminus, whether a stone or a stump buried in the earth,
You have been a god since ancient times.
You are crowned from either side by two landowners,
Who bring two garlands and two cakes in offering.
An altar's made: here the farmer's wife herself
Brings coals from the warm hearth on a broken pot.
The old man cuts wood and piles the logs with skill,
And works at setting branches in the solid earth.
Then he nurses the first flames with dry bark,
While a boy stands by and holds the wide basket.
When he's thrown grain three times into the fire
The little daughter offers the sliced honeycombs.
Others carry wine: part of each is offered to the flames:
The crowd, dressed in white, watch silently.
Terminus, at the boundary, is sprinkled with lamb's blood,
And doesn't grumble when a sucking pig is granted him.
Neighbours gather sincerely, and hold a feast,
And sing your praises, sacred Terminus:
'You set bounds to peoples, cities, great kingdoms:
Without you every field would be disputed.
You curry no favour: you aren't bribed with gold,
Guarding the land entrusted to you in good faith.
If you'd once marked the bounds of Thyrean lands,
Three hundred men would not have died,
Nor Othryades' name be seen on the pile of weapons.
O how he made his fatherland bleed!
What happened when the new Capitol was built?
The whole throng of gods yielded to Jupiter and made room:
But as the ancients tell, Terminus remained in the shrine.

From *Fasti* – book II by Ovid, the Roman poet 43 BCE



'The Feast Before the Altar of Terminus' an engraving by Giovanni Benedetto Castiglione (1609–1644), the Italian Baroque artist, painter, printmaker and draftsman best known now for his elaborate engravings.

Terminus (on the pedestal) is the god of boundary stones and markers (in turn milestones). According to a Roman tradition, a new temple was being built to Jupiter on land dedicated to several gods and goddesses. Terminus and Iuventas were the only ones who refused to vacate the site. His statue was merely a stone or post stuck in the ground to distinguish between properties.



8

**मील
पत्थर**

ROME

DELHI

KABUL

8

Almost all pictures used in this not-for-profit book have been taken from various web sites or blog pages. The editor/author DOES NOT claim any rights to these and the copyright to these belong to respective owner/photographers. Indebted to one and all who found it important to photo a milestone as a memory of their journey or a documentation of these silent sentinels.